

view from the field



CSR Innovation in the Business Strategy Toolkit

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Partnerships. Surely there is nothing innovating in that is there? Fred and Ginger, Lennon and McCartney, Laurel and Hardy, and Holmes and Watson to name but a few. In fact hardly a day goes by without some advertisement proclaiming ‘such and such’ is working in conjunction with ‘so and so’ – Marks and Spencer and Fairtrade being one such recent example. However Royal Mail Group believe its approach to engaging key sections of the community through genuinely symbiotic partnerships is leading the way in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Over the last five years, proactive and structured stakeholder engagement has become the toolkit of choice for leading companies. A genuinely two-way engagement process creates a dynamic context for business. Interaction and dialogue allows individual groups to bring different agendas, goals and priorities to our attention. At the same time, we’ve seen a paradigm shift to sustainability and a rise in ethical consumerism. Consumer surveys regularly highlight trends of increasing concern for the environment and ethics; for example, a SWR poll⁽¹⁾ found that 53% of respondents had considered switching brands due to CSR issues and a recent Guardian/ICM poll⁽²⁾ found that 51% of respondents said they or their family had boycotted a company because its products damage the environment.

At Royal Mail we have developed strategic partnerships with a wide range of organisations across the spectrum of our corporate responsibility activities, encompassing health, safety, environment, social policy and diversity. These partnerships are formed on a mutual win-win basis and are towards the upper end of the stakeholder continuum of information share / dialogue / consultation / engagement. Our partnerships can be grouped into four main categories –

Understanding where we are

Strategic partnerships with key organisations such as Forum for the Future, London Benchmarking Group and Business in the

Community have helped our own understanding of how we are performing on CSR. Through these partnerships we are able to access cutting edge advice and guidance on key CSR issues, as well as being challenged robustly on our own activities. These partners’ independent feedback is very useful from a risk management perspective, providing ‘early warning’ of potential flashpoint issues, as well as helping to identify previously untapped opportunities. In return our partners obtain a corporate viewpoint on key sustainability issues and access to further research opportunities.

Understanding where we want to be

We have signed up to a strategic partnership with the Carbon Trust – a government-funded independent company that helps businesses cut carbon emissions and exploit the potential of low carbon technologies. Through this partnership we have identified a long-term vision of how carbon management will develop and we are putting in place the foundations for a much more proactive carbon management approach within the business; a key component of helping to decouple our economic performance from our environmental impacts. As a result of the awareness raised in this partnership, we believe we will be able to report a significant reduction in our carbon emissions in our next CSR Report.

Communicating the vision

One of our higher profile partnerships, with Help the Hospices, has proved to be very effective in engaging and motivating our people and contextualising our social policy activities. The charity was selected as our Major Supported Charity in 2005 by a colleague vote. Every one of our 3,000 or so sites have now been twinned with a local hospice, enabling our people to fundraise or volunteer directly for a local cause. In addition, we aim to raise at least £1 million over the three-year life of the partnership.

As well as the financial and awareness raising benefits to Help the Hospices, the partnership has had the following benefits for Royal Mail:

- i) raising our profile with our stakeholders;
- ii) affirming our presence in the community;
- iii) helping build our reputation and business opportunity;
- iv) engaging with our people;
- v) team-building through volunteering activities; and
- vi) development of management capability.

Achieving the vision

Finally, partnerships can be instrumental in helping to achieve strategic goals, as shown via our partnership with Payroll Giving in Action and the Charities Trust. Through the support of these bodies we have the largest payroll giving scheme in the UK, with around 25% of our people donating over £180k to charities of their choice every month. We have a stretch target of increasing the levels of payroll giving from £2.2 million to £5 million per annum. This was projected to take 52 years to achieve at our original take-up rate. Through the support of these partner bodies we now expect to hit this target within four years.

In addition, we have been working with Mencap for a number of years to recruit people in the London region and now have a formal partnership with this charity, signing up to their Work Right programme and committing to recruit 50 people with learning disabilities over the next 18 months. We are also working in partnership with Enable Scotland, Mindroom

and Remploy as part of our Recruiting from Socially Excluded Groups initiative, which is having a positive effect on the culture and diversity of our workplaces, enabling colleagues to develop new skills such as coaching and mentoring skills. Because of these partnerships we have been featured in a number of Government publications including the Department for Work and Pension's "I can get a job" publication and the Disability Rights Commission booklet. In this way Royal Mail is being held up as a benchmark for other organisations who wish to look at best practice in order to start to remove their own recruitment barriers.

As John Donne famously said "no man is an island". A similar thought could be applied to companies and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), who by definition cannot operate in isolation. It is almost beyond doubt that the establishment of strategic partnerships between corporates and NGOs will become 'the norm'; we will see today's early mover advantages from current partnerships become 'business as usual'. This approach is reflected by local and central government, who are increasingly working in partnership with third party organisations to help deliver core activities, such as the recent tsunami relief campaign and local hospice care.

Royal Mail is fortunate to be working with a fantastic range of partner organisations – whose dedication and enthusiasm is helping us deliver on our wider ambition to be the best and most trusted postal company in the world.

References:

(1) SWR, 2002, quoted in UNEP's "Talk the Walk: Advancing Sustainable Lifestyles through Marketing and Communications", 2005.

(2) "Most Britons willing to pay green taxes to save the environment", The Guardian, 22 February 2006.

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